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Abstract

Men Are Men and Women Are Women: Gender, Sexuality, and Polish Nationalism in “I Love You No Matter What”

The play *I Love You No Matter What*, written by Przemysław Wojcieszek, premiered in 2005 at the Teatr Warszawa. It follows a homosexual couple, Magda and Sugar, as they navigate personal and political conflicts with the people around them. Written in the midst of Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński’s Fourth Republic and a few years after Poland joined the European Union, *I Love You No Matter What* is in direct conversation with the “moral renewal” the Kaczyński brothers promised after their election—a renewal of “traditional,” Catholic values. Since the fall of Communism in 1989 and the rise of Solidarity as a political force, Catholic values have dominated Polish politics and society, tying into the expectations of Polish nationalism. Polish feminist thought explicitly connects Polish nationalism and the influence of the Catholic Church, though little research and theory into the subject exists in English. However, this presentation—through research and critical analysis—demonstrates how gender, sexuality, and nationalism are tied together and how these constructs affect one’s personal and political lives.

Additionally, this research presentation seeks to establish, by placing a same-sex couple onstage, that Wojcieszek engages with popular narratives of Polish nationalism, challenging and critiquing these narratives through the world of the play. Using primary and secondary resources, as well as the play-text, this presentation asserts that nationalism is inherently gendered and illustrates that narratives of Polish nationalism privilege and reward hypermasculinity and the

heteronormative family unit. Defined as the father who is the breadwinner, mother who is protector of the home, and children who are learning to carry out their nationalistic duties, the heteronormative family unit is framed as a source of stability to the fledgling and newly independent Polish nation-state. Women, and by extension mothers, are left to raise the children, instill nationalist values into said children, and cultivate the home—this duty is essentially the duty of *matka Polka*, or Mother Poland, which is a prevailing myth in Polish nationalism since its origins in 18th and 19th century Polish Romanticism. The Polish nation-state and its institutions, therefore, assign worth to the heteronormative family and mothers by protecting this category of worth in the Polish Constitution. This is in direct contrast to the European Union, which prizes the individual, or the worker, over the family. Prizing the worker, particularly the working woman, is seen as a threat to the Polish nation-state and is discouraged by Polish nationalist narratives because it harkens back to the feminizing forces of the socialist era, those forces namely being an attempt to bring women into the workforce.

Through Magda and Sugar's relationship, and their relationships with the men around them, this research asserts that Wojcieszek criticizes the social norms and expectations surrounding Polish nationalism. While they struggle with personal problems throughout the play, Polish nationalism is the dominant political force in the world Magda and Sugar occupy. Conflict between characters arises because of the ideals of normalcy. Piotr, Sugar's brother, attempts to bring back his absent father in an effort to bring order and normalcy to a family he thinks has been ruined by his domineering mother and a same-sex relationship. Because they are both working women and gay women, Magda and Sugar fall outside Polish nationalist expectations of normalcy and of Mother Poland. This presentation concludes that Wojcieszek prizes the individual and, in the world of the play, rewards Magda and Sugar for prizing the individual as

well, which subverts and undermines many of the characters in the play and directly subverts Polish nationalism.